DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 345 FL 012 542

AUTHOR Rodriguez-Brown, Flora; Elias-Olivares, Lucia
TITLE A Search for Congruency in Language Proficiency Testing: What the Tests Measure--What the Child Does.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 53p.; Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (Los Angeles, CA, April 13-17, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC03 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Audiovisual Aids; Bilingual Students; Children; Classroom Techniques; *Communicative Competence (Languages); Comprehension; Discourse Analysis; *English (Second Language); Holistic Evaluation; Language Dominance; *Language Proficiency; Language Usage; Morphology (Languages); Non English Speaking; Parent Attitudes; Phonology; Pragmatics; Pronunciation; Second Language Learning; Spanish; Syntax; *Testing; Test Reliability; Test Validity; Vocabulary Skills
IDENTIFIERS Questions

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the current developments in regard to the assessment of language proficiency in children who are from non-English speaking backgrounds. Instruments currently used to assess language proficiency for placement in English programs usually fail validity and reliability tests. These tests usually measure formal aspects of language omitting the importance of function in communicative skills. The data used in this study are part of a larger study of language proficiency which includes six bilingual children at different levels of proficiency in both Spanish and English. The study is both qualitative and ethnographic in nature. The children's language repertoire was collected at school and in the community through the use of video and audio tapes and collected field notes. The results of the analysis illustrate that only a small amount of the child's natural language repertoire is measured with tests currently used to measure language proficiency. The authors suggest that discourse analysis be used as a means for enhancing the measurement of language proficiency and for looking at communicative competence. Such analysis provides insight into what children are capable of, rather than what they are incapable of, doing linguistically. (Author/JK)

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A Search for Congruency in Language Proficiency Testing: What the Tests Measure -- What the Child Does

Flora Rodríguez-Brown and Lucía Elías-Olivares*

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*Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association (AERA) Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, California -- April 13-17, 1981

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A Search for Congruence in Language Proficiency Testing:
What the Tests Measure -- What the Child Does

Abstract

Flora Rodríguez-Brown and Lucía Elías-Olivares

This paper focuses on the current developments in regard to the assessment of language proficiency with children who come from non-English speaking backgrounds.

This issue is relevant to bilingual education in particular and education in general. The Lau guidelines mandate that children from non-English speaking backgrounds should be provided with special programs to help them learn English in order that they could enjoy equal educational opportunity. Up to now, participation in these programs (Bilingual Education, ESL, etc.) is determined mainly in terms of language assessment with the result that children are placed in different proficiency levels based upon the Lau remedies. The problem is that instruments used for this purpose usually fail validity and reliability tests and, even those which show the most promise seem to present problems in measuring language proficiency due to the narrow scope of their constructs. These test usually measure formal aspects of language omitting the importance of function in communicative skills. This is done in spite of research findings showing that measures of communicative skills are better predictors of communicative competence than language form related tests.

The data used in this study is part of a larger study of language proficiency which includes six bilingual children at different levels of proficiency in both Spanish and English. The study is qualitative and ethnographic in nature. The children's language repertoire was collected at the school and in the community through the use of video and audio tape and field notes collected by the researchers.

Using this set of data the authors try to explored the following facets:

a. Whether the total score or individual subtest of a test administered to the student are equally valid in predicting language proficiency levels.

b. The congruency between the items of structures used in widely used tests of language proficiency and the actual children's language repertoire collected in the different settings.

c. The possibility of developing new and more comprehensive constructs which involve form and function of language and take into account what children are able to do rather than what adults feel children can do linguistically.

Through the results of the analysis presented here the authors show how little of the child's natural language repertoire is measured with tests currently used to measure language proficiency.

In an attempt to develop new ideas in regard to these constructs, the authors present some data where discourse analysis could contribute toward a new model of looking at communicative competence which, in turn, will enhance the measuring of language proficiency.

I. Introduction

In 1974 the Supreme Court of the United States' opinion in the class suit Lau vs Nichols mandated that non-English-speaking children should be provided with a meaningful opportunity for education in public schools settings. This entitled the children to English language instruction. Once the Lau ruling appeared, the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) requested school districts throughout the nation who received federal funds to carry out a survey to determine how many children in the district came from backgrounds where the home language was other than English. As a result, it was determined that several hundred school districts were not in compliance with the Lau decision. The Office of Civil Rights then prepared a set of guidelines to bring these districts into compliance with the Lau decision; otherwise, noncompliance was at the risk of losing federal assistance. These guidelines were called the Lau remedies. Since then, such issues as language assessment, program placement, program design and entry-exit criteria, among others, became an integral part in decision making in regards to the educational needs of non-English speaking children. This, in spite of the lack of hard data and/or research evidence which will make education decision making soundly based.

From 1974 to this day, decisions are made in regard to who needs special help in learning English through bilingual education or other programs designed for this purpose and/or language used for instruction in the classroom by testing children to determine their language proficiency. What is troublesome is that most instruments used to determine English language proficiency levels have not proved to be reliable or valid.

In general, the constructs of currently used tests are based on adult expectations of what children should be able to produce linguistically rather

than what children do. It is thought, that the dichotomy between what tests measure and what children do linguistically make the relationship between the content of tests and the child language repertoire non-congruent. As such, what tests measure becomes irrelevant or too narrow in scope to portray well the actual richness of the natural language repertoire of children. In this manner, children are penalized for not producing what adults feel they should produce and, in turn, it is impossible to account for the real communicative competence of children.

Tests of language proficiency widely used in bilingual programs vary in the type of constructs used to measure proficiency. Some of them measure mainly vocabulary knowledge, others measure the use of certain grammatical forms varying in complexity, still other tests use a more complete construct, where function as well as form of language are taken into account, to determine language proficiency. Evidence from research, Tucker (1977), Bowen (1977), Cummins (1979), Troike (1981), Rodriguez-Brown (1979) among others, have shown the need to look beyond language proficiency where determining the educational needs of non-English speaking children.

The intent of the paper is to give examples of ways in which current test instruments and actual children's language are non-congruent, so as to specify the need for new constructs which are based in what children can do linguistically. As such, it is expected that most, if not all of the different aspects of communicative competence will be involved in the determination of language proficiency in bilingual children. Tests developed from this perspective should be more holistic in nature and take into account the richness in language use (form and function) found in children's natural language repertoires.

II. Review of Literature

With little change, issues such as language used for instruction in bilingual programs, entrance and exit criteria, grouping criteria, etc., have been dictated by the degree of English language proficiency of children attending these programs. For several years now researchers (Tucker, 1977, Bowen 1977, Cummins 1979, Rodríguez-Brown 1979 and Troike 1981) have noted that language proficiency is but one aspect to be taken into account when determining the educational needs of non-English speaking children. Other aspects to be taken into account are cognitive development and home environment which according to Cummins' (1979) "interdependence" hypothesis interact with first language learning to facilitate or hamper second language learning and school achievement. Bowen (1977), Tucker (1977) and Troike (1981) suggest that there is enough data available to show that language medium of instruction should be determined according to sociol-cultural rather than linguistic characteristics of the children. Rodríguez-Brown (1979) found that cognitive development and home environment are important factors to be taken into account when determining language to be used for reading instruction in bilingual classrooms.

Still, since language proficiency seem to be the most important factor in decision making in bilingual programs, it seems necessary to look at actual test instruments; their validity and reliability and particularly the language constructs they are based on and to find out whether they are congruent with or measure aspects of language commonly found in children natural language.

There are no language assessment instruments available at present that accurately test the ability to function adequately in the educational process. This functional ability, however, is supposedly required by the Lau decision which requires that non-English speaking children are provided with programs

which will enhance their educational opportunity while they learn English as a second language.

De Avila and Duncan (1976) have examined 46 tests of language proficiency and dominance: 43 measured vocabulary range; 34 dealt with oral syntax comprehension; but only 9 were aimed at measuring functional uses of language. This is in spite of the fact that tests of phonology and grammar are not accurate predictors of effective participation in the classroom or communicative competence as shown by previous studies by Savignon (1972), Tucker (1974) and Upshur and Palmer (1974).

Language proficiency should be a measure of communicative competence as defined by Hymes (1972) and subsequently by Halliday (1973), where form as well as function of language are taken into account. Several studies have tried to study whether grammatical or communicative competence constructs are best predictors of communicative competence.

Savignon (1972) studied the test performance of three different groups of students studying beginning French. Although the three groups received the same number of instructional hours, each group received an extra hour of activity which differed from group to group (communicative skills, culture and language lab). End of course tests (one for grammatical competence, four for communicative competence) showed no significant difference in the grammatical competence test but the group that received the extra hour of communicative competence did significantly better than the other two groups. The findings showed that emphasis on basic communicative skills do not interfere with language development and that tests of communicative competence are better predictors of communicative competence than tests of grammatical competence.

Tucker (1974) did a study where he tested two groups of second language learners (one high and one low in grammatical skills) with a test of communicative competence and no significant difference in performance was found in the two groups. That is, the two groups could communicate equally well, in spite of their differences in scores in tests of grammatical competence. These findings again prove that grammatical competence based tests are not good predictors of communicative competence.

Upshur and Palmer (1974) studied linguistic accuracy of their students who had learned English through formal classroom training. They found that linguistic accuracy (as measured by grammar related tests) was not a good predictor of their measured communicative abilities.

These three studies show, in general, how communicative competence tests are better predictors of language proficiency than tests of grammatical competence.

In regard to more holistic perspectives in communicative competence testing, integrative views of communicative competence have shown the need to evaluate form and function of language when determining levels of proficiency in second language learners. Carroll (1978) has distinguished three levels of proficiency (basic, intermediate and advanced). These levels are defined by him in terms of ten evaluation criteria which can be applied to test scoring procedures in integrative test instruments. The criteria are: size, complexity, range, speed, flexibility, accuracy, appropriateness, independence, repetition and hesitation. Morrow (1977) has suggested that communicative tasks can serve as integrative tests of the learner's communicative competence. Morrow (1977) provides a list of criteria which could be used to evaluate this type of tests. They are comprehensibility, appropriateness, grammatical accuracy and naturalness of response.

Functional language competence is defined as the underlying knowledge to make utterances in order to accomplish goals and to understand the utterances of others in terms of their goals (Shuy 1977). Language proficiency cannot be described accurately unless it is assessed in communicative situations which occur naturally. This is needed in order to cover a wide range of communicative skills. In the case of school children this should involve the child's level of facility across different speech events -- conversations with peers and siblings, formal interactions with teachers, etc., and his/her performance within various speech functions such as requesting and giving information, commanding, persuading, complaining, etc. (Hernández-Chávez 1978).

With bilingual children, the specification of the context in which each or both languages are used is relevant because to say that children are dominant or more proficient in English or Spanish is insufficient. As Shuy points out, in order to begin to assess language abilities accurately one has to assess comparative language abilities in a broad number of contexts, specifying in detail where, under what circumstances, and to what extent each language is used, as well as the relationships among those contents (Shuy 1977). Thus, is a bilingual child more dominant or more proficient in English at school?, at the neighborhood playground?, with her or his siblings? One has to consider, then, not only a quantitative dimension but a qualitative dimension as well. A holistic approach to language examines language use in specific situations, with different interlocutors and for different purposes. Furthermore, language variability should be seen as an asset rather than as a liability. Traditionally, and especially in educational circles, bilingual children are considered highly proficient in a language when that language resembles the one used by a monolingual speaker. However, as Lavandera (1978) points out

it is only in bilingually defined settings and situations when the bilingual's total verbal repertoire is fully used, that is, the speaker is able to activate all the varieties possess by him or her, mix them, and thus take advantage of his or her whole communicative competence.

Traditionally, testing situations which are monolingually defined tend to reduce the speaker's linguistic repertoire, which results often in a situation in which the speaker appears to be a non-assertive person, which is a characteristic interpreted negatively in a dominant society (Hymes 1974, Lavandera 1978, Phillips 1972).

If one sustains the view that Hispanic bilinguals can express better the social meanings to communicate effectively only by using their total linguistic repertoire, then one must take into account the whole linguistic continuum, including code-switching behavior.

This paper will review qualitatively, the issue of congruency with child language and predictability of proficiency among commonly used tests of language proficiency in USA bilingual programs and it will discuss current and alternative efforts in developing holistic constructs to measure language proficiency.

III. Research Questions

The data used for this paper are part of a larger study of communicative competence of bilingual children at different levels of proficiency in both Spanish and English. The qualitative nature of the study will serve to develop new hypothesis in regard to the measurement of language proficiency through more holistic constructs and to study the relationship between current test contents and the children language repertoire during a school day and a play session at home.

The main questions to be addressed through the study are:

1) Are individual subtests of a language proficiency test as good predictors of levels of proficiency as the total score? If so, which subtest are better predictors?
2) Can anything be said in regard to form related tests and/or subtests (grammar, phonology, vocabulary, etc.) and tests and/or subtest which measure communicative skills?
3) What is the congruence between the aspects of language and/or items measured by some commonly used tests of language proficiency and the actual children's language repertoire at home and school? This, in terms of occurrence of forms tested in the actual natural language collected from the children.
4) What is it that children do linguistically in natural settings?
5) Are there any ideas as to alternative holistic constructs to language proficiency testing?
6) What could be the contribution of discourse analysis toward new language proficiency test constructs?

IV. Methodology

The data for these papers was collected as part of a larger study of language proficiency in children which try to define levels of proficiency from a communicative competence perspective and from children's actual production in different settings.

School Setting

This paper examines a) the use of questions made by children at different levels of proficiency in Spanish and English and b) the congruency between the language constructs used to measure language proficiency and the natural language repertoire of children video taped in the classroom.

The school attended by these children is situated in a middle-size school district about 60 miles north of Chicago. The bilingual program was characterized as a self-contained integrated program. The children in the class were white, black and Latino English-speaking and a small group of Latino children with low English proficiency. The children attended the program for the full day. They were selected by the school to attend this program by two criteria a) parents who demonstrated interest in their children's learning and/or maintaining another language besides English and b) third graders who showed low English proficiency and who needed special help in learning English and doing their school work in a second language.

Subject Selection

Originally, the investigators visited 3 bilingual classes from which the subjects could be chosen. After observations of each classroom in

terms of program structure, availability of children and teacher cooperation as well as physical environment, 19 children from 2 classrooms were selected as possible subjects for the study.

The purpose of the subject selection was to find Hispanic origin subjects each at one of 6 different levels of Spanish and English proficiency as follows:

1. High English Proficiency -- High Spanish Proficiency
2. High English Proficiency -- Low Spanish Proficiency
3. High English Proficiency -- No Spanish Proficiency
4. Low English Proficiency -- Low Spanish Proficiency
5. Low English Proficiency -- High Spanish Proficiency
6. No English Proficiency -- High Spanish Proficiency

The degrees of proficiency used are the ones described by De Avila (1975) in the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) and which have been approved by the Civil Rights Commission as correlating with the proficiency levels described in the Lau guidelines. These descriptions appear in the Appendix and apply to both Spanish and English.

To select the subjects, the language proficiency of the possible target children was determined by 4 different criteria: a) administration of the LAS in both Spanish and English, b) rating of proficiency levels (in both languages) by the researchers after interviewing each child, c) the teacher's perception of each child's language proficiency in both Spanish and English, d) the children's parents perception of their own child's level of proficiency in Spanish and English. Proficiency levels were descrited according to the definitions stated by De Avila (1975). The list of possible target children was narrowed by choosing only children where at least, three out of these four criteria showed the same levels of proficiency. As much as possible the final subjects should come from the same

classroom, same age and sex, and same ethnic background. Finally we were able to choose children from the same classroom and same age group. Table 1 shows the breakdown by sex and ethnicity of the subjects.

Table 1

Subjects

Breakdown by Proficiency in Spanish and English, Sex and Ethnicity

Subject #	Proficiency Description	Female	Male
1	High English - High Spanish	Mexican	
2	High English - Low Spanish	Mexican/Puerto Rican	
3	High English - No Spanish	Mexican/Puerto Rican	
4	Low English - Low Spanish		Mexican
5	Low English - High Spanish	Mexican	
6	No English - High Spanish		Puerto Rican

All of the subjects were between 8:6 and 9:6 years old and were attending third grade. Subjects (1) (2) and (3) have lived in USA all their lives while all the others have immigrated to this country within the last six years (range from six months to five years). Before these subjects could be selected for the study, parents were requested to submit a written permission form allowing their children to be videotaped in different settings.

Home Background of Subjects

Subject (1) Paula was born in California. She lives with her parents and an older brother. Her mother reports oral and reading ability in English and Spanish. They usually speak more Spanish than English at home and prefer to listen to media in English. They live in an integrated white Hispanic low SES neighborhood. Subject (2) Ana, who was born in Waukegan, Illinois lives in a low middle-class white neighborhood with her mother and a younger brother (age 3). She speaks mainly English at home, though she

practices Spanish when she visits her grandmother who lives in town. Subject (3) Carmen was born in Waukegan where she lives with her mother and stepfather. She has an older sister and a younger brother. She has spoken mainly English at home until her mother remarried someone who spoke only Spanish. The mother is interested in Carmen's participation in this bilingual class so that she learns and practices Spanish. They live in a low middle-class white neighborhood. Subject (4) José was born in Mexico. He came to USA about five years ago. He has older siblings to whom he speaks mainly Spanish. His parents speak Spanish among themselves and Spanish to their children. Both parents, who work full time, report that they listen to the media in Spanish mainly. Their house, which they own, is situated in an integrated neighborhood. Subject (5) Juanita has been in the USA less than a year. She has younger siblings. The grandmother lives with them at home. The parents report that they speak only Spanish to their children. They live in a low SES neighborhood composed mainly of Hispanics and whites. Subject (6) César has been in the US mainland less than a year. He lives with his mother, who speaks only Spanish, and two older siblings who are learning English. The mother reports no proficiency in English and an elementary school educational background. They prefer to listen to the media in Spanish. They live in a low SES mixed Hispanic-Black neighborhood.

Subjects' Teacher

The teacher in the class chosen for the study is an Anglo female. She was born in South America to missionary parents, has a good command of Spanish, and has taught elementary school for two years.

Though there was certain organizational structure in the classroom and with the classroom schedule, the classroom was run in a relaxed

environment where children could interact not only with the teacher but with other children during the different activities. The class was carried out mainly in English, though the teacher often tried to translate for the non-English speaking children, especially to give explanations and/or directions. The teacher taught Spanish to the whole class three times a week, so most children knew some Spanish and they were helpful to those learning English.

The teacher had a teacher aide helping her in the classroom. She is Puerto Rican, dominant in Spanish but with good command of English, though with a strong accent. This teacher aide was in charge of working closely with the four children who had low English proficiency specially in the area of Spanish and English reading and language arts, as well as assisting them with worksheet assignments in different areas.

Data Collection

Before any videotaped data was collected, the researchers visited and observed the classroom, became familiar with the children and visited their homes. This way, field notes were collected which will be discussed in a larger study report. Parents of subjects as well as 25 people each from three different age groups (three generations) were interviewed in regard to their language use patterns and their attitudes toward language, school, etc.

Afterwards, each child was videotaped for one whole day of school. The target child wore a lapel microphone during the taping session. A wireless microphone was tried at first but problems with frequency interruption made it impossible to use for data collection purposes. A stationary camera

(Sony AVC 3250) was used for data collection. The camera was focussed on the target child and the children around her/him.

Subsequently, children were video-recorded at home playing with other children and at a picnic where all six children interacted. This video-taping was done with a Sony AVC 3250 stationary camera. Several audio recorders were used to collect data in areas where the camera was not focussing. Besides, the parents were audio-recorded during the interview to collect some parent language data which will be analyzed for the larger study. The data to be used in this study include only the videotapes of the classroom.

Data Analysis

A transcription code system was developed to analyze the videotaped data. Appendix B shows a transcription form. The columns include the following information:

(1) Location of interaction or utterances (in the case of solliloquia)
(2) Speaker: TC=target child, AC=another child, T=teacher, Exp= experimenter
(3) Transcription (only conversations in which the target child was involved were transcribed
(4) Context (information relative to the lesson, activity, etc.)
(5) Immediate situation (a brief description of what is happening between people involved in the interaction)
(6) Translation (if in Spanish)

The transcription system was explained to several assistants who transcribed the tapes. An experimenter was available to clear up any ambiguity,

especially at the beginning of this data analysis. Subsequently, a different assistant checked the same tape to assure the reliability and validity of the information.

A coding system to separate the interactions was designed, with the same information from the transcripts. An interaction was defined as a series of conversational turns by two or more speakers around a common activity or topic and temporally related. A listing of these interactions per child form the language repertoire for the study. For the present paper we are using only the school language repertoire.

This repertoire was quantified according to the number by utterances. Utterances are defined as units of speech (sentences, phrase, words) which express an idea and/or intent. Spanish and English utterances for each child have been counted. It is important to clarify that the number of utterances is not a measure of language proficiency in Spanish or English. It is expected that a child who is more proficient in English will produce more utterances in English than Spanish and vice versa. In bilingual children though, the language used in interactions will depend on the situation, the context, the interlocutor, etc., involved in the interaction. Utterances, at times, can be just one word while others can be very complex sentences in form and/or function and, as such, they do not reflect the same degrees of proficiency. Table 2 shows the total count of utterances representing the collected language repertoire for each child to be used in the study. As explained before, this is in no way a description or representation of the language proficiency of the subjects.

Table 2
Language Repertoire
Per Subject, Language and Setting

A. Per Subject and Language

Subject	Utterances			
	Total	% English	% Spanish	% Mix
Paula	874	64.5	33.5	1
Carmen	603	96.7	2.7	.6
Ana	536	94.5	5.4	--
Jose	393	18.4	80.4	1.2
Juanita	1143	13.0	84.7	2.3
Cesar	653	16.5	83.1	.4

B. Per Language, and Setting

Subject	English			Spanish		
	Total Utterances	% Home*	% School	Total Utterances	% Home	% School
Paula	576	50.1	49.9	187	93.5	6.4
Carmen	591	54.3	45.7	120	90	10.0
Ana	468	44.4	55.6	68	17.6	82.3**
Jose	103	44.7	55.3	284	70.8	29.2
Juanita	167	74.3	25.7	941	86.0	14.0
Cesar	99	76.8	23.2	527	72.7	27.3

NOTE: *Home language was collected mainly from playing activities with siblings and/or friends.

**Ana's Spanish repertoire at school includes a 15 minute talk with one of the experimenters. The conversation was all in Spanish and most of Adriana's utterances in Spanish were one word utterances (vocabulary items).

V. Test Constructs and Predictability of Language Proficiency Levels

Subjects for this study were selected when at least three out of four criteria used to determine their language proficiency showed the same proficiency levels. One of the criteria used was the Language Assessment Scales (LAS) results. This test is based on the premise that language consists of four primary subsystems: the phonemic system, the referential system, the syntactical system and the pragmatical system. The test construct then, measures different aspects of these subsystems. The test includes five subtests described as phonemic, minimal sound pairs, lexical or vocabulary, sentence comprehension and production (a story retelling subtest which measures pragmatic use of language).

For most of the six children chosen in the sample, the LAS results showed levels of proficiency which were the same as at least two of the other three criteria involved in the selection process, namely the proficiency levels as determined by the teachers, the investigators and the parents. Only in three cases was there a difference between the levels assigned by the other criteria and the LAS results. This difference occurred with the Spanish proficiency levels. An analysis by subtest was done to determine whether all subtests or some of them were better predictors of the proficiency levels. The LAS Manual and Technical report (De Avila 1975) does not explain the method used to determine the breaking points to determine the different levels. The breaking points are described in Table 5.

Table 3

Interpretation of LAS Scores in Terms of Levels

Score	Description	Level
85 to 100	Totally fluent in English (or Spanish)	5
75 to 84	Near fluent in English (or Spanish)	4
65 to 74	Limited English (or Spanish) speaker	3
55 to 64	Non-English (or Spanish) speaker, apparent linguistic deficiencies	2
54 and 60	Non-English (or Spanish) speaker, total linguistic deficiency	1

A per cent of right answers per subtest was determined for each subject. Table 4 (A and B) shows this information as well as the subtest proficiency levels using the same breakpoints as for the total score. The data were reviewed to determine which subtests and how often the subtest scores were two or more levels of proficiency different from the total score. Subtest scores were defined as non-congruent with the total score when there were two or more levels of proficiency difference between the subtest and the total score.

Table 4

Per Cent of Responses According to Subtests

A - English Test

Subtest	Paula		Ana		Carmen		José		Juanita		César	
	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level
I Phonemes	100	5	93	5	96	5	70	3	86	5	47	1
II Minimal Sound Pairs	100	5	100	5	95	5	90	5	90	5	47	1
III Lexicon	100	5	100	5	100	5	67	3	75	4	72	3
IV Oral Comprehension	100	5	90	5	90	5	70	3	40	1	60	3
V Pragmatic Use of Language*	--	4	--	5	--	5	--	2	--	2	--	1
Total LAS Score and Level	86	5	98	5	95	5	57	2	57	2	43	1

*For subtest V a level was assigned according to different factors (see De Avila 1975).

B - Spanish Test

Subtest	Paula		Ana		Carmen		José		Juanita		César	
	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level	%	Level
I Phonemes	86	5	80	4	86	5	73	3	93	5	37	1
II Minimal Sound Pairs	80	4	60	2	45	1	95	5	95	5	95	5
III Lexicon	100	5	94	5	92	5	100	5	97	5	94	5
IV Oral Comprehension	100	5	90	5	100	5	100	5	80	4	90	5
V Pragmatic Use of Language**	--	5	--	2	--	1	--	3	--	5	--	5
Total LAS Score and Level	95	5	61	2	50	1	86	4	96	5	90	5

**For subtest V a level was assigned according to coherence of content of the story, repeated syntactic errors, word combination, completeness of sentences, accuracy of story.

A review of the data in Table 4 shows that for the English test on six occasions the subtest provided a score (level) two or more levels different from the level assigned by the total score. In this case, usually the levels shown in the subtest were higher than the levels assigned by the total score. This difference in levels appeared in three different subjects and only with the low English proficiency subjects (levels 1, 2 and 3) who were learning English as a second language. In general, it can be said that for English proficient children each one of the individual subtests was a good predictor of the total level of proficiency, but it tended to vary some with low English proficiency children, especially the lexicon and minimum sound pairs. For that reason then, the whole LAS English test score is a better predictor of the language proficiency of the students. The story retelling subtest (pragmatic use of language) proved to be as a good a predictor of English proficiency as the total score for all children.

For the Spanish form of the LAS though, three of the five subtests (phonemic, lexical and oral comprehension) produced scores two or more levels of difference from the total score. Students were overscored by the subtest while the total score showed much lower proficiency in Spanish. These subtests by themselves are not good predictors of language proficiency levels, especially in children who were not highly proficient in that language. Again, the only subtest which seemed to predict the levels of proficiency of the children tested as well as the total test score is the pragmatic use of language subtest which measured mainly communicative competence as determined by the construct used for scoring this section.

Since the LAS is one of the most widely used test of language proficiency in bilingual programs, it seems worthwhile to do a larger

study to determine if these differences between the total and subtest scores occur often enough to call for a review of some of the subtests.

Our data though seems to go along with findings by Savignon (1972), Tucker (1974) and Upshur and Palmer (1977) which show that communicative competence tests are, in general, better predictors of language proficiency than grammatical competence based instruments.

Since the previous studies were done with College students, these findings suggest that the same holds true for younger children who are learning a second language or who still have not attained full development in their first language.

VI. Congruency Between Some Tests Widely Used to Determine Language Proficiency and the Actual Children Language Repertoire

While some tests used to measure the language proficiency of bilingual students are based on constructs where several aspects of language are measured (i.e. LAS), others measure language proficiency by looking at only one aspect of language (i.e. vocabulary or syntax).

The James Language Dominance test is based on a vocabulary (production and comprehension) construct. It is a test widely used to determine levels of language proficiency in bilingual programs. Although the test is to be used with K through second grade children, school districts use it in higher grade levels in elementary school. The test has a form in Spanish and one in English; both of them have the same vocabulary items.

For each language, there is a section on production and one on comprehension of vocabulary. The test was developed to evaluate "language competence" (James 1974:10) of students in Spanish and in English. Although the manual states that the items are listed in order of difficulty (James 1974:11), there is no explanation as to the criteria used for item selection.

Taking the whole corpus of utterances which appears in the interaction repertoire of each subject in the language proficiency study, a check was done to determine how many of the items which appeared in the James Language Dominance Test would appear in the children's language repertoire collected during a whole day of school. This analysis may give us an idea as to whether the items in the test occur frequently in children's talk and whether the words are organized in order of difficulty.

The analysis of the English production subtest shows that 9 items out of the 20 items appeared in the children's school language repertoire. Six items each appeared in the repertoire of two of the three children who were proficient in English while none of these items were used by the other child. José who was rated low in proficiency in Spanish and English produced three items.

The items which appeared in the school repertoire were mostly those which were related to school (book, pencil, sitting, talking, eating, scissors and home). One interesting finding is that items listed in English as talking, eating, sitting, and drinking do not appear often as ing forms in the children's utterances but just as talk, eat, sit and drink. This form seems to be more common in the children's language repertoire.

In the case of the home repertoire 8 items appeared in the children's home repertoire. They mostly appeared in English proficient children. Some of the items were the same as they appeared in the school's repertoire (house, pencil, eating, talking, sitting). So in reality only 3 new items appeared and with very low frequency (two times maximum). Only 12 of the 20 items appeared in the total data and the larger number of occurrences appeared in the children who were proficient in English.

For the English comprehension subtest only four items appeared in the children's school repertoire (show, chair, swimming and dog) among the different children. The ing form listed in the test did not appear when a child used swim. The child with the lowest English proficiency used dog and swim which are at the beginning and at the end of the test; a surprising finding if one assumes the items are ordered by difficulty level.

Six items appeared in the home repertoire data. Two of them have occurred in the school repertoire (dog and swimming). In all only 8 items

occurred in the overall children's repertoire out of the 20 which appear in this subtest.

Only four items in the Spanish production subtest occur at least once in the school repertoire for the six children. Again, casa (home) appears to be common, together with other items which could be related to school activities (tijeras, sentado, libro). Six items appeared in the home repertoire. They only appeared in the two children who were highly proficient in Spanish. Only 4 of these items did not appear in the school repertoire (plato, come, habla and lapiz). So only 8 items out of the 20 appeared in the children's total collected repertoire.

From the Spanish comprehension subtest, four items appeared in the repertoire (lumbre, zapato, duerme and nada). These items do not appear as listed in the test but modified according to ethnic differences or discourse preferences of children (fuego, tenis, dormí and nadar). Six items occurred in the home repertoire. Of these, five were new items (carro, cuchara, estufa, silla, llora). Only nine out of 20 items appeared in the total collected repertoire for the six children.

If we were to find how much of the language repertoire, in terms of number of utterances, were taken into account in assessing the children language proficiency through the vocabulary items in the test, we find that a very small part of the children's total collected repertoire was taken into account (range from 3.6% to 8.4% in English and from 0% to 4.2% in Spanish). From this perspective, the children may seem to be much less proficient than if the whole language repertoire was taken into account for the assessment. We are not trying to imply that the children did not know the items in the test but they may not occur with high frequency in natural

language settings. Part of the problem is that tests are usally designed by adults and according to adult expectations of what children can do rather than from observations of what children do. The data, as analysed, show little congruence in terms of vocabulary used by children and what this test of vacabulary measures. In general, the test tells us very little about the vocabulary the children know and almost nothing about their language proficiency.

Another test widely used in bilingual programs is the Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM) (Burt et al. 1975). This test measure language proficiency in terms of language development using a syntax construct. Syntax was chosen as a measure of proficiency because the authors thought that: 1) Vocabulary varies according to experience and bilingual children have very heterogenous (socially and culturally) backgrounds in terms of experience; 2) Pronunciation shows a lot of variability across dialects and idiolects and accent is an indicator of other aspects such as SES, ethnicity, etc., than of language proficiency and 3) Functional use of language (communicative skills) is hard to produce systematically, efficiently and naturally in large numbers of children.

The test has a form in Spanish and one in English and the score is mainly based on the use of different grammar structures which appear in children at different stages of language development. The test uses the "structured conversation" (Burt et al. 1975:14) technique of eliciting natural speech. It was developed and normed with K through second grade students, although it is often used with older children in elementary schools. This test places children in five proficiency levels: Level 1 -- no proficiency, Level 2 -- some comprehension but not oral production

proficiency, Levels 3, 4 and 5 are determined in terms of particular groups of structures acquired hierarchically by children as they are at different levels in the language acquisition process. Breaking points to define levels were determined by setting up points where at least 75% of the children had acquired a specific set of structures. So a score of 95-100 indicates the child is at Levels 5 (Proficient), a score of 85-94 indicates Level 4 (Intermediate), and á score of 45-84 or lower corresponds to Levels I or II, depending on the degree of comprehension.

Table 5 shows a list of the different structures that both the Spanish and the English tests measure.

Table 5

List of Structures Measured by Items in BSM

	Spanish Structure		English Structure
1.	Present Indicative	1.	Short plural
2.	Possessive, article	2.	Plural copula
3.	Adjective Gender	3.	Singular Copula
4.	Copula (estar), article	4.	Article
5.	Copula (estar), adjective gender	5.	Progressive-ing, plural auxiliary, plural copula
6.	Progressive (ando / iendo)	6.	Article, plural copula
7.	Copula (ser)	7.	Singular auxiliary, singular copula, article
8.	Past Subjunctive (Perfect)	8.	Progressive-ing
9.	Reflexive (se) indirect object pronoun, infinitive	9.	Long plural
10.	Reflexive (se) direct and indirect object pronouns	10.	Perfect conditional
11.	Reflexive (se), conjunction (que), present subjunctive	11.	Possessive
12.	Reflexive (se), article, direct and indirect object pronouns	12.	Past irregular
13.	Conjunctions (que), present subjunctive		

Each test (Spanish and English) has 18 items which measure individual structures or several of them which occur together as listed. The first eight structures are part of the proficiency repertoire of children at Levels 3 and 4 while the other five appear in Level 5 children (proficient in English).

With this data at hand, a check of each child's classroom interaction repertoire was carried out to determine how many of the structures listed appeared in their natural interactions.

Tables 6 and 8 show the list of structures measured and the total number of occurrences per child in English and in Spanish. The criteria for Level 3 performance is that the children produce six or less of the structures listed from items 1 through 8. Level 4 children are those who produce seven or more of the first eight listed structures (tested through ten items). Level 5 children are those who perform well in six out of the eight items which measure the use of structures 9 through 12 or 13 as listed in Tables 6 and 8.

Table 6

Structures Measured by Items in the BSM and Their Occurrence in Children's Total Language Repertoire Collected

ENGLISH FORM

Structures \ Child	Proficiency Level 5 Paula Total Use: 148		Proficiency Level 5 Ana Total Use: 95		Proficiency Level 5 Carmen Total Use: 127		Proficiency Level 3 José Total Use: 19		Proficiency Level 2 Juanita Total Use: 19		Proficiency Level 1 Cesar Total Use: 26	
	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%
1. Short Plural	19	10.1	6	6.3	16	12.6	2	10.5	--	--	2	7.7
2. Plural Copula	13	6.9	--	--	7	5.5	1	5.2	--	--	--	--
3. Singular Copula	60	31.9	42	44.2	50	39.4	4	21.1	6	31.6	13	50
4. Article	12	6.4	19	20.0	12	9.4	2	10.5	3	15.8	--	--
5. Progressive-ing, plural auxiliary, plural copula	9	4.8	3	3.2	8	6.3	--	--	1	5.3	--	--
6. Article, plural copula	1	.5	1	1.1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
7. Singular auxiliary, singular copula and article	27	14.4	5	5.3	7	5.5	1	5.2	--	--	2	7.7
8. Progressive-ing	17	9.0	6	6.3	10	7.9	2	10.5	8	42.1	1	3.8
9. Long Plural	1	.5	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
10. Perfect Conditional	3	1.6	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
11. Possessive	3	1.6	5	5.3	2	1.6	--	--	--	--	--	--
12. Past Irregular	23	12.2	24	25.3	15	11.8	7	36.8	1	5.3	8	30.8
Total Corpus of Utterances in English	676		458		591		103		147		119	
Percent of Utterances Using Tested Structures		27.8		20.7		21.5		18.4		12.9		21.8

The English test results show that a larger (in numbers) and more varied number of structures appeared in children proficient in English (Level 5 according to our criteria) while very few were used by children at proficiency levels 1, 2 and 3. The structures most often found in all students were the singular copula, the progressive and the past irregular. From these, only the past irregular is among the five structures which determine the Level 5 of proficiency according to test performance. The long plural and the perfect conditional only appeared with low frequency in the balance bilingual subject. They did not appear in the other two English proficient children in the sample.

The analysis of the total repertoire shows most of the structures appeared in the English proficient children. It can be noted that in general a very low percentage of the total language repertoire is used in determining language proficiency in these children through this test (from 12.9 to 27.8 per cent). Taking into account a small sample of the children language repertoire this test is leaving aside a large sample of what children can do linguistically and taking into account only what adults feel is important in measuring proficiency.

Tables 7 A and B show the occurrence of the different English structures at home and in school separately. These tables show in general that even the low English proficient children are using English more at home than in school. This may be due to the more structured situation in the classroom and the fact that these LEP children are grouped together for instruction. Maybe if they interacted more with English speakers the patterns will change. Home situations where the data were collected involved children playing with siblings and friends and in those situations it seems as if English was used more frequently in spite of the low proficiency of the subjects.

Table 7

A - Structures Measured by Items in the BSM and Their Occurrence in Children's School Language Repertoire

ENGLISH FORM

Structures \ Child	Proficiency Level 5 Paula Total Use: 91		Proficiency Level 5 Ana Total Use: 49		Proficiency Level 5 Carmen Total Use: 68		Proficiency Level 3 José Total Use: 8		Proficiency Level 2 Juanita Total Use: 12		Proficiency Level 1 Cesar Total Use: 28	
	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%
1. Short Plural	16	17.5	3	6.1	15	22.	2	25	--		2	25
2. Plural Copula	8	8.8	--	--	7	10.2	--	--	--		--	--
3. Singular Copula	25	27.4	16	32.6	21	31.9	1	12.2	2	16.7	4	50
4. Article	6	6.6	11	22.4	6	8.8	2	25	1	8.3	--	--
5. Progressive-ing, plural auxiliary, plural copula	1	1.1	2	4.1	5	7.3	--		--		--	--
6. Article, plural copula	1	1.1	1	2.0	--	--	--		--		--	--
7. Singular auxiliary, singular copula and article	--	--	1	2.0	--	--	--		--		--	--
8. Progressive-ing	15	16.5	6	12.2	9	13.2	2	25	8	66.7	1	12.5
9. Long Plural	--	--	--	--	--	--	--		--		--	--
10. Perfect Conditional	2	2.2	--	--	--	--	--		--		--	--
11. Possessive	3	3.3	2	4.1	1	1.5	1	12.2	--		--	--
12. Past Irregular	14	15.4	7	14.2	4	5.9	--	--	1	8.3	1	12.5
Total Corpus of Utterances in English	337		250		270		57		23		43	
Percent of Utterances Using Tested Structures		27		19.6		25.2		14		54.2		18.6

B - Structures Measured by Items in the BSM and Their Occurrence in Children's Home Language Repertoire

ENGLISH FORM

Structures \ Child	Proficiency Level 5 Paula Total Use: 97		Proficiency Level 5 Ana Total Use: 62		Proficiency Level 5 Carmen Total Use: 59		Proficiency Level 3 José Total Use: 11		Proficiency Level 2 Juanita Total Use: 7		Proficiency Level 1 Cesar Total Use: 18	
	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%
1. Short Plural	3	3.1	3	4.8	1	1.7	--	--	--	--	--	--
2. Plural Copula	5	5.2	--	--	--	--	1	9.1	--	--	--	--
3. Singular Copula	35	36.1	26	41.9	29	49.1	3	27.3	4	57.1	9	50.0
4. Article	6	6.2	8	12.9	6	10.2	--	--	2	28.6	--	--
5. Progressive-ing, plural auxiliary, plural copula	8	8.2	1	1.6	3	5.1	--	--	1	14.3	--	--
6. Article, plural copula	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
7. Singular auxiliary, singular copula and article	27	27.8	4	6.4	7	11.9	1	9.1	--	--	2	11.1
8. Progressive-ing	2	2.1	--	--	1	1.7	--	--	--	--	--	--
9. Long Plural	1	1.0	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
10. Perfect Conditional	1	1.0	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
11. Possessive	--	--	3	4.8	1	1.7	--	--	--	--	--	--
12. Past Irregular	9	9.3	17	27.4	11	18.6	6	54.5	--	--	7	38.9
Total Corpus of Home Utterances in English	339		208		321		46		124		76	
Percent of Utterances Using Tested Structures		28.6		22.1		18.3		23.9		5.6		23.7

For the Spanish test data, again, a large and more varied number of structures appear in the more Spanish-proficient children (Level 5). Only one structure copula (ser) appeared in all subjects. One structure (reflexive (se), indirect object pronoun, infinitive) did not appear in any of the subjects. It is interesting to note that the balance bilingual subject, Paula, produced only two of the five structures required to be Level 5 and each structure appeared only once.

In general, a very low percentage (from 2.2% to 15%) of the total number of utterances were used in evaluating language proficiency by using the BSM syntax construct. In this case the Spanish test used much less of the subjects total repertoire than in the English test. It seems again as if current test constructs are too narrow to cover the richness of repertoire in children's natural language and, as such, they overlook a lot of what children are able to do linguistically.

Table 8

Structures Measured by Items in the BSM and their Occurrence in Children's Total Language Repertoire Collected

SPANISH FORM

Structures \ Child	Proficiency Level 5 Paula Total Use: 28		Proficiency Level 1-2 Ana Total Use: 4		Proficiency Level 1 Carmen Total Use: 2		Proficiency Level 3 José Total Use: 31		Proficiency Level 5 Juanita Total Use: 102		Proficiency Level 5 César Total Use: 77	
	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%
1. Present Indicative	--	--	--		--	--	1	3.2	2	2.0	6	7.8
2. Possessive, article	--	--	--		--		--	--	--	--	4	5.2
3. Adjective Gender	2	7.1	--		--		--	--	10	9.8	6	7.8
4. Copula (estar), article	8	28.6	--		--		3	9.7	13	12.7	5	6.5
5. Copula (estar), adjective gender	1	3.6	--		--				1	1.0	3	3.9
6. Progessive (ando/iendo) auxiliary (estar)	1	3.6	--		--		1	3.2	11	10.8	4	5.2
7. Copula (ser)	13	46.4	3	75	2	100	7	22.6	37	36.3	21	27.3
8. Past Subjunctive (Perfect)	1	3.6	--		--		4	12.9	--	--		
9. Reflexive (se), indirect object pronoun, infinitive	--	--	--		--		--	--	--	--	--	--
10. Reflexive (se), direct and and indirect object pronouns	1	3.6	--		--		7	22.6	11	10.8	19	24.7
11. Reflexive (se), conjunction (que), present subjunctive	--		--		--		1	3.2	2	2.0	3	3.9
12. Reflexive (se), article direct and indirect object pronouns	--		1	25	--		3	9.7	--	--	3	3.9
13. Conjunction (que), present subjunctive	1	3.6	--		--		4	12.9	15	14.7	3	3.9
Total Corpus of Total Utterances in Spanish	187		58		9		287		954		552	
Percent of Utterances Using Tested Structures		15.0		6.9		2.2		10.8		10.7		13.9

*Note: Conversation in Spanish with Experimenter mainly monosyllables.

Tables 9 A and B show the analysis done with the school and home language repertoire's data separately. Paula, the balance bilingual subject shows much more use of Spanish at home than in school. This is due in part to the fact that she is grouped with English speakers in the classroom while at home she was playing with bilingual or monlingual Spanish speakers. Table 9 B shows that a very low percentage of the home language repertoire was taken into account in determining language proficiency in Spanish through the BSM. This may be due to the fact that Spanish used in the classroom was much less formal than the English used there.

In the case of the BSM most of the structures measured in the test appeared in the language repertoire of the children studied. More structures appeared in subjects who were more proficient in Spanish and/or English than in those less proficient in those languages. Still, the test seems to measure only what adults feel children should know to be proficient in a language and leave aside most of what children do in terms of communicative skills. This happens in spite of the fact that current research shows communicative skills to be better predictors of communicative competence and language proficiency than grammar or vocabulary tests.

The main problem with current test constructs is that they are based on adult expectations of what children can do rather than what they actually do linguistically. There is a need for finding new test constructs to measure language proficiency which are more holistic in nature and show a knowledge of or are based on what children do with language. These tests should approach the measurement of communicative competence from a wider perspective where form and function of language are involved and

Table 9

A - Structures Measured by Items in the BSM and their Occurrence in Children's School Language Repertoire

SPANISH FORM

Structures \ Child	Proficiency Level 5 Paula Total Use: 7		Proficiency Level 1-2 Ana Total Use: 3		Proficiency Level 1 Carmen Total Use: 0		Proficiency Level 3 José Total Use: 21		Proficiency Level 5 Juanita Total Use: 42		Proficiency Level 5 César Total Use: 40	
	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%
1. Present Indicative	--	--	--		--	--	1	4.7	1	2.4	6	15
2. Possessive, article	--	--	--		--		--	--	--	--	2	5
3. Adjective Gender	--	--	--		--		--	--	9	21.4	3	7.5
4. Copula (estar), article	5	71.4	--		--		--	--	--	--	--	--
5. Copula (estar), adjective gender	1	14.3	--		--		--	--	1	2.4	2	5
6. Progessive (ando/iendo) auxiliary (estar)	--		--		--		--	--	--		1	2.5
7. Copula (ser)	1	14.3	2	66.6	--		2	9.5	9	21.4	3	7.5
8. Past Subjunctive (Perfect)	--		--		--		4	19		--	--	--
9. Reflexive (se), indirect object pronoun, infinitive	--		--		--		--	--	--	--	--	--
10. Reflexive (se), direct and indirect object pronouns	--		--		--		6	28.6	5	11.9	17	42.5
11. Reflexive (se), conjunction (que), present subjunctive	--		--		--		1	4.7	2	4.8	2	5
12. Reflexive (se), article direct and indirect object pronouns	--		1	33.4	--		3	14.3	--	--	2	5
13. Conjunction (que), present subjunctive	--		--		--		4	19.0	15	35.7	2	5
Total Corpus of Utterances in Spanish	12		56*		--		86		145		169	
Percent of Utterances Using Tested Structures		58.3		5.3		0		24.4		29.2		23.7

*Note: Conversation in Spanish with Experimenter mainly monosyllables.

B - Structures Measured by Items in the BSM and their Occurrence in Children's Home Language Repertoire

SPANISH FORM

Structures \ Child	Proficiency Level 5 Paula Total Use: 21		Proficiency Level 1-2 Ana Total Use: 1		Proficiency Level 1 Carmen Total Use: 2		Proficiency Level 3 José Total Use: 10		Proficiency Level 5 Juanita Total Use: 60		Proficiency Level 5 César Total Use: 37	
	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%	# Occurrences	%
1. Present Indicative	--	--	--		--	--	--	--	1	1.7	--	--
2. Possessive, article	--	--	--		--		--	--	--		2	5.4
3. Adjective Gender	2	9.5	--		--		--	--	1	11.7	3	8.1
4. Copula (estar), article	3	14.3	--		--		3	30	13	21.70	5	13.5
5. Copula (estar), adjective gender	--	--	--		--		--		--	--	1	2.7
6. Progressive (ando/iendo) auxiliary (estar)	1	4.8	--		--		1	10	11	18.3	3	8.1
7. Copula (ser)	12	57.1	1	100	2	100	5	50	28	46.7	18	48.6
8. Past Subjunctive (Perfect)	1	4.8	--		--			--				--
9. Reflexive (se), indirect object pronoun, infinitive	--		--		--		--					--
10. Reflexive (se), direct and indirect object pronouns	--		--		--		1	10	6	10.0	2	5.4
11. Reflexive (se), conjunction (que), present subjunctive	--		--		--			--	--	--	1	2.7
12. Reflexive (se), article direct and indirect object pronouns	--				--			--	--		1	2.7
13. Conjunction (que), present subjunctive	1	4.8	--		--			--		--	1	2.7
Total Corpus of Home Utterances in Spanish	175		12		9		201		809		383	
Percent of Utterances Using Tested Structures		12.0		8.3		2.2		5.0		8.0		11.5

*Note: Conversation in Spanish with Experimenter mainly monosyllables.

where natural language samples are the source of information about the language proficiency of each subject.

The following section of the paper will discuss some of our current work in this direction.

VII. Discourse Analysis and Language Proficiency

In trying to find alternatives to current testing constructs in language proficiency, we have been studying ways in which discourse analysis using natural children language samples can contribute toward more comprehensive constructs in measuring language proficiency. One of the aspects we are studying is the issue of how Hispanic children who are at different levels of proficiency in English and Spanish ask questions in those languages to their peers during their interaction in the classroom, and what are the social variables that influence the types of questions used. We intend to see if there are any differences in the type of questions used by children who are more proficient in one or the other language.

As Ervin-Tripp (1977) has stated, certain communicative acts are especially suitable for functional language analysis. Questions, for example, have a high frequency of occurrence, require responses by the addressee and the audience, and are used to communicate a variety of intentions.

There have been some studies dealing with the questioning strategies used particularly by English monolingual children with ages similar to those included in this study (Ervin-Tripp 1977, Dore 1977, Peck 1978). Most of the issues raised in those studies have dealt with whether children use the same discourse patterns as adults do. In our study we will be examining the repertoire of questions used by six children of Spanish-English speaking background who are at different levels of proficiency in both languages.

Data and Discussion

The data for this study come from the child-child and child-teacher interactions in the classroom which were extracted from the transcripts. Interactions are defined as a series of conversational turns by two or more speakers around a common activity or topic, and temporarily related.

Two hundred and fifty six questions were asked by the six children in the school setting. Table 10 lists the types and gives the code, the definition, and an example of each types of questions. From this Table it can be noted that the children's repertoire of questions goes beyond simple requests for information -- as questions are generally considered -- to requests for action, or imbedded imperatives, to rhetorical questions, etc. The data were coded independently by two experienced coders to assure inter-rater reliability.

We are not claiming here that this is the best taxonomy that can be used to describe the types of questions used by these students, but based on the available studies and on our intuitions, we feel that this is an adequate way to organize the data.

A quantitative analysis of the data (Tables 11 and 12) demonstrate that in general, questions occur more often in the language in which the children are more proficient. Furthermore, there is no significant difference regarding the number of questions used by every child.

Table 10

Repertoire of Questions and Examples of
Communicative Intentions and Their Meaning

Requests for Information ... solicit information about the identity, location, time or property of an object, event or situation; e.g., ¿En cual página vas tú?

Requests for Clarification .... solicit more specific information when the child has failed to understand the referent of the previous utterance; a reason or explanation; e.g., Which one?

Requests for Approval .... to request a judgement or an attitude about events or situations; e.g., Do you think this looks good?

Requests for Action .... solicit the listener to perform, not to perform, or stop to perform an action; e.g., José, ¿préstame esta goma?

Request for Permission .... solicit permission to perform an action; e.g., Miss Jones, can I finish this?

Yes/No Questions .... solicit affirmation or negation of the propositional content of the addressor's utterance; e.g., Are we leaving now?

Rhetorical Questions .... solicit a listener's acknowledgment to allow speaker to continue; e.g., ¿Tú sabes cuántas malas me saqué?

Hesitation Questions .... answer a question with another question, showing hesitation and insecurity; e.g., Here .... living room?

Table 11

Number and Percentage of Questions Asked Per Child

SPANISH

Level	5		5		5		3		1-2		1		Total Number of Questions Used by All Children	
Child	Paula		Juanita		César		José		Ana		Carmen			
	Total Use: 3		Total Use: 40		Total Use: 35		Total Use: 28		Total Use: 0		Total Use: 0			
Occurrences and Percent	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%
Req. Info.	3	100	23	57.5	17	48.6	10	35.8	--	--	--	--	53	50
Req. Clarif.	--	--	1	2.5	--	--	4	14.2	--	--	--	--	5	4.7
Req. Permis.	--	--	1	2.5	2	5.8	--	--	--	--	--	--	3	2.8
Req. Approv.	--	--	2	5.0	1	2.8	3	10.7	--	--	--	--	6	5.7
Yes/No Ques.	--	--	11	27.5	11	31.4	3	10.7	--	--	--	--	25	23.6
Req. Action	--	--	--	--	4	11.4	3	10.7	--	--	--	--	7	6.6
Rhet. Ques.	--	--	--	--	--	--	1	3.6	--	--	--	--	1	1.0
Hesi. Ques.	--	--	2	5.0	--	--	4	14.3	--	--	--	--	6	5.6
Total	3		40		35		28		--		--			

Table 12

Number and Percentage of Questions Asked Per Child

ENGLISH

Level	5		5		5		3		2		1		Total Number of Questions Used by All Children	
Child	Paula		Ana		Carmen		José		Juanita		César			
	Total Use: 44		Total Use: 51		Total Use: 48		Total Use: 5		Total Use: 1		Total Use: 1			
Occurrences and Percent	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%	Occ.	%
Req. Info.	21	47.7	28	55	28	5.83	1	20	1	100	--	--	79	52.7
Req. Clarif.	1	2.2	10	19.6	5	10.4	--	--	--	--	--	--	16	10.7
Req. Permis.	1	2.2	--	--	8	16.7	--	--	--	--	1	100	10	6.6
Req. Approv.	1	2.2	2	3.9	1	2.1	--	--	--	--	--	--	4	2.7
Yes/No Ques.	6	13.6	8	15.7	4	8.3	--	--	--	--	--	--	18	12.0
Req. Action	3	6.8	2	3.9	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	5	3.3
Rhet. Ques.	6	13.6	1	1.9	2	4.2	--	--	--	--	--	--	9	6.0
Hesi. Ques	5	11.4	--	--	--	--	4	80	--	--	--	--	9	6.0
Total	44		51		48		5		1		1			

Requests for information were the types of questions that had the highest degree of frequency of occurrence in English (52.7%) as well as in Spanish (50%), followed by yes/no questions (23.6% for Spanish and 12% for English).

Requests for permission and for clarification had a higher incidence of occurrence among children who were more proficient in English.

It needs to be pointed out that the reason behind why some of the children asked questions of a certain type only in one of the two languages may be due to the kind of set up which existed in the classroom. The limited English proficiency (LEP) students in this sample were perhaps involuntarily isolated from the rest of the students most of the time, because they were working in small group situations with the teacher aide, and the interaction tended to be in Spanish. Even when the groups were reading in English, the children asked the teacher aide questions in Spanish to which she also replied in Spanish.

At the same time, there is a tendency to group those students who are equally proficient in both languages with English monolingual students. This is the case with Paula, the most balanced bilingual of the group, who was always assigned to work with English monolinguals. This situation may hinder her chances to maintain and improve her proficiency in Spanish while she continues to develop her proficiency in English.

It remains to be seen when we look at data in other more natural settings, which are the types of questions for children who have low proficiency in one of the two languages.

Not all utterances were composed of full propositions. Many questions consist of only one word requests, for clarification, such as huh?

which is a recurrent pattern in children with low proficiency. This was a common case with Ana when she tried to have a conversation with one of the researchers in Spanish.

Some of the questions were ambiguous. Yes/no questions seemed similar on certain occasion to requests for approval, and requests for information could have been coded also as imbedded imperatives. After looking at the context it was clear that the question was a request for action by the addressee, as in the following example:

César: ¿Tienes lápiz grande? (Waits for pencil.)
Préstaselo a José.

Arturo: No sabía que eras su amigo tantito.

César: Tantico nomás. Préstaselo pa'cer el work y más na.

(F1-2)

Rhetorical questions seem to be a more sophisticated level of language use. The majority of the rhetorical questions were in English and were used by students who had a high level of proficiency in that language, e.g.,

Paula: These are my pencils.

Mimi: One is mine.

Paula: That's ... How am I going to erase them?
Mimi, could I have your eraser?

(E8-3)

It is obvious in the preceeding example that the addressor does not expect to get an answer to her question and thus, she continues with the next request for action. An interesting kind of discourse pattern is when questions are used to answer other questions when speakers do not want to commit themselves to a definite answer, e.g.,

T: How would you feel about this friend of yours telling your teacher?

Paula: Sad?

T: What would you want to do with that friend?

Paula: Beat him?

(E8-B)

These types of answers are particularly noticeable in the speech of José, a very low proficiency speaker in English, when he tries to communicate in that language, e.g.,

T: José, tell me where are these people going to sleep

José: Here ... living room?

T: Okay. No, in the bedroom.

(A2-1)

T: Where did you put your milk?

José: In here.

T: What's that?

José: The refrigerator?

(A2-2)

José's hesitation and insecurity in answering in English is increased by the attitude of the teacher who often ignores his questions and goes ahead with her speech without paying attention to him. Furthermore, he does not seem to be accepted by the rest of his classmates who feel that his Spanish discourse relies too heavily on lexical items which they do not consider appropriate for classroom interactions. They do not waste

time in laughing about him when he makes a mistake. This contributes to his feeling of insecurity and to his hesitating questions, e.g.,

T: But this here is a rug. It's on the ....

José: Rug? (Everybody laughs, José looks embarrassed.)

T: It's on the floor. The rug is on the floor.

Although Paula shows this pattern in her discourse once in a while, her answers marked by intonation do not produce the same derisive reaction as José's, because Paula is a leader in the class due to her high proficiency in both languages.

One can see then that the same types of questions are asked in both languages, although children who are more proficient in English seem to have access to a greater variety of questioning strategies. It needs to be pointed out also that the type of setting or activity will influence the language in which the questions are asked and that consequently, in a bilingual class children have to be given an opportunity to work in different groups so that they are not involuntarily isolated from a richer language experience.

In our larger study with different contexts it may be possible to show that some types of questions could be specific to certain levels of proficiency in English or Spanish. If so, this could be the basis for a construct aimed at determining language proficiency. This construct would have to take into account the whole child's communicative competence rather than concentrating only on limited aspects of language competence (vocabulary, grammar), which are based on adults expectations of what children can do linguistically.

VIII. Conclusion

In the first section of the paper data was reviewed which seems to show that multifaceted test constructs including communicative skills are better predictors of language proficiency levels than tests which measure only one aspect of communicative competence. The data show, too, that a sub-test testing communicative skills can be as good a predictor of language proficiency as the whole test but that the grammatical skills subtests do not predict as well.

Along the same line, Savignon (1977), Tucker (1974) and Upshur and Palmer (1977) have shown that tests which measure communicative competence skills are better predictors of communicative competence than tests based on grammatical skills.

In evaluating language proficiency, tests which measure one aspect of language with specific items tend to limit the range of communicative competence characteristic of the subjects in determining their language proficiency. In many cases there may be incongruencies between the subject's production and the test construct which may hinder the valid determination of the language proficiency of an individual.

In the second section of this paper we have shown that children who are at different levels of language proficiency possess a rich repertoire of interrogative forms which they use in their interaction in the classroom to communicate various messages, such as requests for information, requests for action, requests for permission, etc. Questions have a high degree of usage in the language in which the child is more proficient, and they are often determined by the type of setting or activity in which the children participate.

It appears that when the whole language repertoire of children is analysed from an integrative perspective, a better description of their communicative competence is achieved. It was not the intend of the study to make generalizations from the findings. The different levels of proficiency of the children in the study, though, were representative of children attending bilingual programs and, as such, their language behavior may be similar, in terms of their communicative repertoire per level.

Up to now, most tests used to measure language proficiency in children use testing constructs based on adult expectations of what children should know linguistically rather than what children can actually do. This may give rise to situations where the communicative competence of a child is under or over-estimated since the test construct is irrelevant, incongruent or too narrow in scope to look at the richness in the whole language repertoire of the child. By looking for what we adults feel children should know we have been disregarding children's actual performance.

New studies in child discourse across levels, as the one discussed in this paper, may open new avenues toward testing constructs which are holistic, and which take into account form as well as function in language. Thus, we may better understand the communicative competence of bilingual children. These new constructs will try to find what children are capable of, rather than what they are incapable of doing linguistically. At the same time they look at the child's entire language repertoire rather than a limited sample of it in determining levels of language proficiency in bilingual children.

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APPENDIX

English Proficiency Levels -- Explanation

Proficiency Level I

The students in this group do not speak, understand, or write English, but some may know a few isolated words or expressions.

Proficiency Level II

This group includes children with little knowledge of English. The speakers in this category often have great difficulty in comprehending and speaking English. Consequently, attempts at elicitation often are met with silence, a repetition of the questions or gestures (pointing, nodding, etc.).

Proficiency Level III

Speakers in this group have difficulty comprehending many things in the English language. Elicitations of many types of constructions frequently will be met with silence or repetitions of what has been said. However, they are sufficiently in control of the language to communicate, using poorly formed syntactic constructions. Although these children may occasionally produce good phrases and simple sentences, they generally will fail to provide a noun with the proper preceding article, be unable to manage agreement between subject and verb because of the inability to make the appropriate correlations between person, number gender, and subject-object forms for pronouns, and will have difficulty distinguishing singular and plural forms of nouns. Difficulty with the auxiliary verb is most evident in this range. Omission of the verb, (especially forms of "be") is also characteristic of this group of speakers. These speakers have been exposed to the major sound system in English and to the basic syntactic structures. They are usually at the Pre-primer stage in literary ability.

Proficieny Level IV

Speakers in this group both comprehend and respond to English better than those in Level III. However, they often do not respond without the use of one of the prompting techniques. Although they tend to use a large number of poorly formed constructions, these deviant forms will alternate with their well-formed counterparts. Their language facility could be

described as being in a state of flux. Their reading ability is usually 1-2 years below that of English speaking students. Thus, while they will continue to make the same general kinds of "mistakes" as those in Level III, they will not be making them so frequently. If these students are excluded at this state of their language development it would doom them to "failure." Therefore, they will continue to receive bilingual classes to insure continued academic growth and reinforcement.

Proficiency Level V

This group includes competent speakers of English. These speakers both comprehend and respond in English. They have internalized the rules for most well-formed constructions, and their syntactic lapses are relatively minor. These lapses are of the type that may persist into adult speech, marking them as slightly deviant by middle class standards. These speakers in many cases have been eliminated from bilingual or TESL classes, but require some other sort of supplementary language program. Examples of the kinds of syntactic lapses that occur among these speakers are mainly problems with the auxiliary verb and with the use of the negative. These students usually are reading close to or on grade level.